

Against the Grain - Collecting Contemporary Art at the Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester, UK

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In this paper I will address the ways in which we collect contemporary art at the Whitworth Art gallery, with reference to the methods of and approaches to collecting by other public galleries in Britain.

The Whitworth Art Gallery is part of the University of Manchester and as such is one of the premier University galleries in Britain, ranking alongside the Fitzwilliam at Cambridge University, the Ashmolean at Oxford, and the Hunterian at Glasgow University. It is one of a group of institutions within the University of Manchester that hold cultural collections, the others being The Manchester Museum, the John Rylands Library, Jodrell Bank radio telescope and Tabley House.

Within Britain three main kinds of public gallery and museum exist, these are: Nationals; those run by Local Authorities; and finally University galleries. Nationals are funded directly by the Government and include the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the British Museum, the Tate Gallery and its outposts at Liverpool and St. Ives in Cornwall, National Museums and Galleries in Liverpool, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Local Authority galleries are geographically specific and are paid for by the tax payers of the city or borough to which they belong such as Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery or Manchester's City Art Gallery. University galleries and museums are principally funded by their parent university and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Other galleries beyond these principal public institutions include exhibiting venues such as Ikon in Birmingham and artist-run galleries such as Castlefield Gallery in Manchester, this kind of gallery often being funded by the Arts Council. Finally, in London and some of the larger cities there are numerous commercial galleries.

The Whitworth was founded in 1889 through the bequest of Sir Joseph Whitworth, a pioneering engineer whose

wealth was the result of his pioneering work in the field of precision engineering, the regularisation of screw sizes, and a method of rifling in gun barrels that was adopted wholeheartedly by the British Army. In his will he asked that an educational institution should be created after his death. His friend and executor, Alfred Darbishire, chose to interpret this as an art gallery. Vast sums of money were spent on the creation of the new building and adjoining park, both of which were completed in 1908, making 2008 the Whitworth's centenary year. The collection, which I will describe in some detail later, was based upon the areas of Fine Art and Textiles, the latter being presented to reflect the centrality of textile design and manufacture to the wealth of Manchester.

Until the 1950s the Whitworth still functioned as an independent institution but was in some financial difficulties. In the period after the Second World War there was a great upsurge in University building in Britain and The University of Manchester began a programme of expansion. When Universities are wishing to establish themselves as nationally or internationally significant institutions they often seek to create or acquire art galleries as a means of reflecting their status as centres of learning and culture and this was the case with Manchester and the Whitworth Art Gallery. The University invested much money in the modernisation of the gallery, and in return acquired one of the foremost collections of drawings and watercolours in Britain.

The University has had for many decades a department that teaches History of Art, now called Art History and Visual Studies. The head of this department was throughout the 'fifties and 'sixties also the Director of the Whitworth. In the 1970s with the urgent need for the professionalisation of the post of Director and also of curators within the gallery this situation was changed, though the close connections

between the discipline of Art History and the Gallery persist.

Overview of the Collections

The Collections are made up of approximately 1500 Modern and Contemporary works, 4500 historic drawings and watercolours, 11,000 modern and historic prints, 17,000 textiles and more than 25,000 wallpapers, the latter collection being developed since the 1960s to represent the design and production of wallpaper in Lancashire. The programme of collecting described here only relates to the Fine Art collection, with which I work. The Fine Art Collection's most notable feature is its excellent representation of landscape art from eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain with numerous works by artists such as JMW Turner, Thomas Girtin, Paul Sandby, David Cox and Thomas Hearne. Within the historic collection, these great names are supported by thousands of works by sometimes lesser known artists which contribute to an outstanding visual catalogue of the ways in which the British landscape and the landscapes of Empire and the Grand Tour were envisioned. The historic landscapes contribute to the mythologisation of England and the consolidation of the idea of 'Great Britain' and its Empire. Wales, Scotland and Ireland are represented in subordinate roles. The Modern and Contemporary Collection – in particular recent contemporary acquisitions – augments, confirms and also critiques this mythologisation, traditional landscapes giving way over time to images of the city and representations of urban spaces in all their complexity, which speak of cultural difference and diversity. The strength of the landscape collection plays, and will continue to play, a central role in the selection of works of art for acquisition.

Methods of Collecting

In Britain, and particularly outside of the Nationals, collecting has been difficult since the economic recession of the 1980s led to far reaching budget cuts across city and borough councils. Quite simply, many galleries are still unable to collect significantly because they do not have a purchase

fund. The Whitworth Art Gallery is fortunate in having been the object of much affection for many art gallery goers in the North West of England. Some of these have left the gallery money in their wills which means that the Whitworth does have a small purchase fund which it can use to apply for matched funding from bodies such as the government funded Museums, Libraries and Archives/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the independently financed Art Fund. Though in some years purchases have been few, the Whitworth has never been forced to give up collecting. For, of course, the gallery that stops collecting ceases to be participating fully in the shaping of the art historical record and providing an account of our own visual culture in the present.

As well as purchasing works from artists, dealers and auction, the Whitworth receives many works of art as gifts and bequests. Like all public galleries in Britain, we are guided in our acquisition by our Collecting Policy which outlines the nature of the collections and the ways in which we would like to see them develop. In the past year the policy for Modern and Contemporary Art has been revisited and rewritten by Maria Balshaw, our Director, David Morris, Head of Collections, and me. Whilst it is good practice to re-address such policies every few years, this rewriting was particularly important as it changed the emphasis of our collecting from particular artists, movements and schools to ideas about images and how they would relate to academic scholarship and in line with the gallery's strategic vision to be seen as one of the leading university art galleries in the world. It now states that:

Over the next ten years the gallery will make modern and contemporary acquisitions that will engage with recognised research specialisms in our (and other) universities, where these research areas engage with and reanimate our understanding of the Whitworth's historic and contemporary collections. There will be a planned programme of acquiring works that deal with issues that are key within contemporary art practice and that offer the possibility of unique and innovative engagement for visitors, students and scholars. We believe that this is fundamental to our role as a university art gallery – a creative laboratory for ideas about contemporary visual culture.

Specifically, over the next five years we will actively prioritise art, both British and international, that interrogates place, politics and identity. Within this focus, we will seek to acquire works that:

- present new ways of understanding landscape, the city and the diversity of culture that is played out in these arenas.
- represent gender and sexuality.

This rethinking of the Whitworth's approach to collecting has come about for several reasons, these being: the need to engage more fully with the teaching, learning and research of academics within our parent university in Manchester; to make our collections work harder for us, both as works to be seen and admired by visitors but to also earn their keep as cultural objects within a diverse and changing world; to look beyond the self-referential microcosm of the established art gallery; and because of the need to adopt a more radical approach to collecting as a form of 'writing' visual history and culture. This final point is central to the approach that we are now taking to collecting.

Our art galleries have been built upon an historicist approach. This has depended and structured itself entirely around a conservative ideology which places artists within a trajectory of time that moves forwards, a discourse of progress that classifies artists according to period, school, taste and canon. Works of art are hung out onto the washing line of history, gaps left where an artist or movement is missing to be fitted in once the right work comes up for sale, is gifted or bequeathed. This form of art history, as ordained by the connoisseur, and like its aged parent historicism, is outmoded. Walter Benjamin teaches us that history is no longer thought of as a straight line, with one event or artwork following on from the other. Instead, he tells us, it;

is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallises into a monad.¹⁾

This practice of 'brush[ing] history against the grain'²⁾ has for a long time been tolerated within art galleries in relation to interpretation within exhibitions. However, its application is not generally regarded as an essential tool within the repertoire of the curator's collecting practices. This is surely a matter of some significance since unlike curating an exhibition, which is, by its very nature transitory, the act of collecting is a form of 'writing' history which, we must

presume, is permanent, for all time. When a work enters the archive, we assume it does so forever. It becomes an active participant in the processes of history. As curators Benjamin offers us a choice which for us at the Whitworth is very stark. If we pliantly accept works into the collection as 'cultural treasures' or 'documents of civilization' we have to remember that we do so at a great price for, quoting Benjamin, there,

is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.³⁾

In 'brushing history against the grain' in our practice of collecting we seek to set the works of the past, cheek by jowl with those from 'the time of the now' in striking intertextuality and shocking constellation, to 'blast open the continuum of history'.⁴⁾

It is within universities that the debates about the shape of history have taken place, so it is entirely fitting that it should be within university galleries that this approach to reading visual history 'against the grain' is applied.

This new thinking about collections has been influenced by several strands of work within the Collections team over the past eight years - these being the Contemporary Art Society's Special Collection Scheme; the use of contemporary art alongside the art of the past in exhibitions; and the ways in which academics' research interests might be reflected in exhibitions and within the collections.

The **Special Collections Scheme** was set up by the Contemporary Art Society, a London-based organisation whose purpose is to promote the art of the today throughout British art galleries and also with private collectors. The CAS was aware that galleries outside of the Nationals were finding it difficult, sometimes impossible, to raise the funds to purchase contemporary art and also that many curators had neither the skills nor confidence to initiate purchases. To counter this growing trend it set up the Special Collections Scheme in 1999, funded in the main with monies

1) Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations* (London, 1992), p.254.

2) Benjamin (1992), p.248.

3) Benjamin (1992), p.248.

4) Benjamin (1992), p.254.

awarded by the Arts Council Lottery. Fourteen galleries across England made a small financial commitment to the Scheme, and in return were given £30,000 each year for five years to buy contemporary art. The Whitworth Art Gallery was one of these galleries and it was one of my tasks to identify works that we would like to purchase, and to liaise with the CAS, artists and dealers. One important part of the agreement with the CAS was that the participating gallery would choose a particular theme that would form the focus of its collecting. The Whitworth's excellent holdings of landscape art were the starting point for our thinking about what to seek to acquire.

Thinking of the landscape collection in some ways as an outward looking prospect we chose to conceptually turn the view around and acquire works that were in some way about the landscape of the interior and of architectural space. As the gallery's landscape images are dominated by those made before the twentieth century, it also became a dialogue between the art of the past and that which had only just been produced or that was yet to be produced. As described earlier, the relationship between historic art and contemporary has since become central to the ways in which we are collecting at the Whitworth. Thirty six works were acquired during the five year period of the scheme and include works by Jane and Louise Wilson (which I will speak of later), Michael Landy, Tacita Dean, Rachel Whiteread, and other less well-known artists such as Ilana Halperin, Jacqueline Donachie, Ewan Gibbs.⁵⁾

Use of Contemporary Acquisitions in Exhibitions

The relationship between the 'art of the now' and the art of the past is put to good use in exhibitions. *Concrete Thoughts* was an exhibition idea that was proposed to the Whitworth by two art historians, Dr Steven Gartside and Dr Sam Gathercole, the former having a teaching post at another of Manchester's Universities, Manchester Metropolitan University. Their proposal was to highlight the relationship that they had perceived between post-war

Modernism in British architecture, exemplified by the work of the Alison and Peter Smithson, Erno Goldfinger and the Peterlee housing estate in County Durham, and the work of specific contemporary artists working in Britain, namely Jane and Louise Wilson, Toby Paterson and Rut Blees Luxemburg. To this exhibition idea the Whitworth's collection was able to bring new acquisitions that we had not yet had a chance to show, these being Jane and Louise Wilson's video work *Monument (Apollo Pavilion, Peterlee)* (2003) bought from the Lisson Gallery, London, and Toby Paterson's sculpture *New Plan* (2003), bought from The Modern Institute in Glasgow. In the course of discussions with the guest curators several works from the 1960s were also selected from the collection, these being by Anthony Hill, Mary Martin and Kenneth Martin. Moreover, the gallery's relationship with Toby Paterson had the opportunity to develop and the artist was able to make a new wall drawing specially for the exhibition. *Concrete Thoughts* was shown at the Whitworth in autumn 2006.

Reflecting the Research Interests of Academics within the Collections

From the moment that the Whitworth became part of the University of Manchester, academic staff began to use the collections for research and teaching. This has continued since the 1950s and also developed into the field of Museology, the University having one of the first Museum Studies course in Britain. In recent years the Gallery has shifted from the expectation that staff from the discipline of Art History will have an automatic interest in the works of art that are in the collection to the idea that collection strengths need to be mapped on to academics' research interests across disciplines and also that the collection might be shaped in some ways by those interests. The mapping approach has many examples, but a handful would be the connection between Dr Anna Carden-Coyne's research within the discipline of History into the cultural impact of the Second World War and the approximately fifty drawings and watercolours that were presented to the Whitworth by the War Artists' Advisory Committee in 1947; another would be the use of the Gallery's holdings of works by William Blake

5) For a full list of works purchased see Appendix 1.

by Dr Colin Trodd, a lecturer within Art History and Visual Studies, this connection resulting in an exhibition that is to open at Seoul National University's Museum of Art in November 2008. John McAuliffe from the Centre for New Writing used the fine art collection to engage his creative writing students in ekphrasis, whilst the Head of Archaeology, Professor Julian Thomas, approached me with an exhibition idea which focused upon the work that Manchester archaeologists along with those from four other English universities had been engaged in on the excavations at Stonehenge. Let us take a closer look at this example.

The notion of connecting one of Britain's most iconic and oldest buildings with contemporary art had already been made by Julian Thomas and his colleague Dr Helen Wickstead, who had organised a programme of artist residencies during the excavations at Stonehenge in the summer of 2007. It was the works that had been produced during the dig by the six resident artists that the Whitworth was being asked to exhibit. At the time of the approach by Professor Thomas, I was planning a re-hang of the Modern Collection and felt that the incorporation of the Stonehenge-inspired work could give a public platform to the important work that our University's Archaeologists were carrying out as well as demonstrate how living artists had a valuable contribution to make to our understanding of the people of pre-history. Historic images of Stonehenge from the Whitworth's collection were added to the exhibition, which would operate intertextually with the contemporary works – the resulting exhibition being called *Drawing Stonehenge*.

The rest of the re-hang was very much influenced by my engagement with the academics and artists, the thinking that had shaped the Stonehenge residencies and the 'new' anthropologically inflected archaeology that was being applied to Stonehenge for the first time. Entering into the playful mode that the artists and archaeologists had adopted, I decided to employ an archaeological metaphor when approaching the collection and treat it as though it was a site of excavation. Works of art were regarded as 'finds' and selected for their representations of small overlooked objects, things at the edge, and those which bore the traces of marginalised people. I thought of these things depicted as evidence of how human beings have made sense out of the world, an idea described by Carlo Ginzburg, who writes:

Man has been a hunter for thousands of years. In the course of countless chases he has learned to reconstruct the shapes and movements of his invisible prey from the tracks on the ground, broken branches, excrement, tufts of hair, entangled feathers, stagnating odours. He learned to sniff out, record, interpret and classify such infinitesimal traces as trails of spittle. He learned how to execute complex mental operations with lightning speed in the depths of a forest or in a prairie with its hidden dangers.⁶⁾

When displayed, the connections between these works would be discovered anew by viewers, they would find their own trails, areas of emphases, visual rhythms and correspondences. Drawn entirely from the modern and historic collections, this exhibition is called *Some Smaller Things* and opened alongside *Drawing Stonehenge* in summer 2008. The works in *Some Smaller Things* are displayed in a way that expresses the visual connections that I as their curator have perceived within them. This hang is also intended to break with the conventional exhibition armature of the hanging line that can sometimes allow the mostly small scale works on paper that we have in the Fine Art collections at the Whitworth to be overlooked. This method's visual disjuncture coerces the viewer to look closely at the framed piece of paper, seeking to see the picture that the artist has made for us. Three new acquisitions are shown in this exhibition of thirty three from the collection, Gordon Cheung's *Brueghel's Highway* (2004) and Humphrey Ocean's drawings *Warning and Knots (Wallpaper)* both from 1997. Historic and modern works are hung together because of the conceptual and formal links found within them so works that have been unseen in the gallery for decades because of their 'minor' nature have been brought to the foreground. In addition, the works displayed are not accompanied by interpretative labels, but instead small quotations are interspersed between the works to provide clues suggesting why I selected these particular images.

Roberta Breitmore by Lynn Hersman Leeson

An important example of how academic engagement has influenced the Whitworth's collecting is to be found in the

6) Ginzburg, Carlo, *Myths, Emblems and Clues* (London, 1990), p.102.

intersection of Professor Amelia Jones (Art History and Visual Studies), the work of the American contemporary artist Lynn Hershman Leeson and the Whitworth's curators and collections. Because of Jones' scholarship in the area of performance art and a particular emphasis upon the work of Hershman Leeson, the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington in Seattle offered the Whitworth a retrospective exhibition of Hershman Leeson's work. This exhibition, *Autonomous Agents*, was shown at the Whitworth in the autumn of 2007 to much acclaim. As a direct consequence of this exhibition and the relationship built up with the artist, her seminal work *Roberta Breitmore* was offered to the gallery as a possible purchase.

Roberta Breitmore is widely regarded as Lynn Hershman Leeson's most important work to date. This extensive artwork, comprising 170 items, was created between 1974 and 1978. *Roberta Breitmore* is a performance, photographic and video work which explores the notion of identity as constructed through the body, cosmetics, clothes, behaviour, legal and medical records, relationships, domestic space, and the effects of spectacle and surveillance – all set within late twentieth century San Francisco. Lynn Hershman Leeson created Roberta Breitmore by assembling and wearing an outfit or costume consisting of a red dress, cardigan and coat with a leather handbag, sunglasses and a blonde wig. The artist planned the application of cosmetics to alter her appearance, recording this process on 'construction charts' and by being filmed by Eleanor Copolla making herself into Roberta. The fictional character of Roberta moved further into the realm of the 'real' by having a driver's licence, bank account, apartment, dental records, a psychiatrist, a series of penfriends and blind dates. These friends and acquaintances were gathered through the placing of advertisements in newspapers and magazines, including the *San Francisco Progress*. Roberta Breitmore's blind dates with men were recorded through photography, the photographer being directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson to take long, medium and close-up shots in the style of a private investigator. *Roberta Breitmore* spawned a set of multiples, three women dressed identically to the original, who lived in San Francisco. Photographs in the series show the eerie image of a Roberta multiple close to Hershman Leeson at a gallery opening, the artist having directed the photographing of this situation.

Roberta Breitmore officially came to an end in 1978 when an event was held in Lucrezia Borgia's Crypt in the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara. Termed an 'exorcism' by the artist, the history of Roberta was played out by one of her multiples, Kristine Stiles, ending in the burning of an image of Roberta Breitmore. Since then, Roberta has been manifested in other guises – the interactive robotic work CybeRoberta and, most recently, as an avatar in her own virtual history in *Second Life*.

When this complex work was offered to the Whitworth its difference from our existing holdings was striking. Though we have exhibited photography many times, the gallery has little of this medium in the collection. The modern collection is predominantly made up of art made within the British Isles and Ireland apart from a small number of notable Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works and whilst there are works by women artists in the collection, its dominant discourse is undoubtedly gendered male. To engage with *Roberta Breitmore* fully would mean to brush against the many grains of how a revered collection such as the Whitworth's came to exist. To purchase this work with a full understanding of its implications would be a clear articulation of our revised collecting policy. Whilst *Roberta Breitmore* could be thought of as fitting into the existing intention to acquire international prints, it was felt that a thorough overhaul of the policy was required, not to make this body of work 'fit' in some way, but to ensure that what it addressed as a work of art – that being the radicalisation of notions of identity and how this is created, fractured and struggled within the landscape of the city – should become central to the gallery's thinking about collections. In addition it would make demonstrable the Whitworth's belief that to engage with the world of ideas through the university and its staff also meant that these would be enshrined within the sacred centre of an art gallery, its collection.

Within the Fine Art collection there are two areas that *Roberta Breitmore* could speak to most forcefully: identity and gender, as manifested in portraits and representations of the body; and place, as found in landscapes and images of the city.

Identity and Gender

Most of the representations of women that the Whitworth has in its collection have been made by men, e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* (1867) by Ford Madox Brown, Camille Pissaro's *The Young Maid* (1896), Camden Town period drawings by Walter Sickert, Picasso's *Femme vue de dos* (1922), Augustus John's drawings of peasant women on the west coast of Ireland, drawings by John Banting, Frank Auerbach, Roger Hilton. The idea of the self and the other is notably played out in Francis Bacon's *Portrait of Lucian Freud* (1951), and *Man's Head (Self Portrait I)* (1963) by Freud. These works, and the many others that could be cited as examples, would be problematized by *Roberta Breitmore*. In crude terms of number, the current weighting of the collection towards images made by men of women would be shifted significantly. The questioning of methods of representation that Hershman Leeson brings about through her work - for example, *Roberta's Body Language Chart* (1978) - would come into contact with and subvert the discourse that has so far been dominant within the space of the collection. Moreover, one of the histories of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been the normalization of women artists. This seminal work is a prime example of the kind of work that should be acquired as part of that process of redressing the balance. As Professor Amelia Jones observed in a statement supporting our application for funding, writing:

The acquisition of *Roberta Breitmore* by the Whitworth Art Gallery would make available a premier group of works central to the histories of feminist, conceptual, and performance art. The works would provide an opportunity for creative curatorial forays into broader shows addressing aspects of these important movements, they could also be extremely useful as teaching materials. For example, my specialist seminars on 'Body and Representation', 'Identity and the Visual', as well as my broader lower level survey courses on contemporary art and performance art could centre around visits to the collection for the students to see first-hand the documentation artifacts of one of the most important projects in contemporary art history.

Place and Identity

As already stated, the Whitworth's international reputation rests upon its collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century British landscape watercolours, with many of these works being requested for national and international loan. The Modern Collection adds to this significantly, but the addition of Roberta Breitmore would shift that story considerably. Roberta literally lived in San Francisco, the shape of the city and her relationship to it contributed to the shaping of her identity. She continues to 'live' in the virtual geography of the Internet. This idea would resonate across the Whitworth's collections, tying in with research into the relationship of place and identity.

Whilst developing the reasoning behind the acquisition of this work, it was also necessary to view it fully so I visited Lynn Hershman Leeson at her studio in San Francisco and inspected the entire body of work, carrying out condition reports on all of the items. After a long and thoughtful process of deliberation and a growing understanding of how significantly it could affect the nature of the collection, it was decided that the gallery would try to purchase the work if supplementary external funds could be raised. This process was successful, with the MLAV&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the Whitworth contributing towards the purchase price. The work was purchased from bitforms gallery, New York and shipped to the Whitworth where it now awaits cataloguing and use by curators and academics. In December 2008 Amelia Jones and her students will use it within a collection based seminar and it will be exhibited as part of a collections display in early 2009 where it will be exhibited alongside five monoprints by Tracey Emin that the Whitworth has just purchased from Gagosian Gallery, London.

Another very recent purchase has been a video work by the Northern Irish artist, Willie Doherty. *The Visitor* was made in 2008 and is, at the time of writing, yet to be shown in the gallery. Doherty is known for his concern with the ways in which 'The Troubles' of Northern Ireland have left their stamp on the people and places of the six counties. 'The Troubles' were the local name given to the war that played itself out between extreme Irish Republicans, Loyalist paramilitaries

and the British Army between 1969 and the present day. The shootings and bombings, murders and executions so rife for decades are now finally on the wane, and much of the military machinery and infamous buildings have been removed or pulled down. But the effects of such a life for so many years has its effect on a place and the people who live there and Doherty draws this out in his work.

The Visitor tells the story of a man sometimes pursued by and sometimes following a dark stranger. He has fleeting glimpses of him in a forest, he seeks him out in old photographs. The narrator finds his image and recognises him as a young man shot by a single bullet near to a barricade. The narrator follows the visitor to an apartment block, the bleak building that we are shown in some detail. The poetic connection between the forest and the building is developed, the narrator finishing his tale by telling us that, 'It was as if the forest existed beneath the city and the streets had become part of the forest.'

The work recalls images and tropes from Irish and English literature – the form of the short story itself, the dark stranger who appears forebodingly, the threat that is contained within the forest and the overwhelming knowledge that the wildness of nature will always, in the end, consume the bodies and thoughts of the living.

In considering this work for purchase a number of issues were considered carefully. Firstly, Doherty's consistency in making works that expressed his preoccupation with the weight of memory, place and loss on a culture and the ways in which this work in particular addressed these. The artist's concern with place chimed with the Whitworth's stated desire to acquire works that readdressed and problematized the idea of landscape, its relationship with the city and with the way in which it shapes personal and cultural identity. It was agreed that we should acquire the work, which was purchased from Matt's Gallery in London in July 2008.

The presence of such a work within the collection animates the existing landscape collection in many and exciting ways. Until 2000, artists from Ireland were classified within the collection as being British, a designation that

ignores the centuries of tension, debate and violence around the idea of Irish autonomy. Now, Irish artists are accorded their own nationality and make present the complexity of what art made within the archipelago of the British Isles might be. *The Visitor* speaks with a troubling disquiet and undermines complacent readings of colonial landscapes in the historic collection. WJT Mitchell questions the idea of landscape art being the 'sacred silent language of Imperialism'⁷⁾ and observes that as well as moving outwards into the foreign field, Empires also look inwards with '...a renewed interest in the re-presentation of the home landscape, the "nature" of the imperial center.'⁸⁾ With this in mind, we can look afresh at drawings and watercolours of English hills, trees, rivers and coasts and read them as expressions of imperial place.

The Whitworth Art Gallery is currently making plans to embark on a building programme which will include an extension out to the south of the gallery. Situated as it is within a park on the meeting point of the areas of Rusholme, Moss Side, Fallowfield and Chorlton-on-Medlock, the gallery is remaking itself as a place where the University, the international community of ideas and of the local public can meet and exchange images and concepts. The gallery already has a spatial relationship with the outside, vast windows having been punctured through an early twentieth century curtain wall during the 1960s reconfiguration and refurbishment of the gallery. It is planned that this transparent boundary between inside and outside will be made permeable by the addition of the new building with an entrance that will extend into the park and towards the people of Rusholme, making it clear that the gallery is open to all. The extension into the landscape also develops at the level of metaphor, with the plan that the new building will house the Fine Art collections and a newly created International Centre for the Study of Landscape in its contemporary and radicalized form.

7) Mitchell, W. J. T., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, 2002), p.13.

8) Mitchell (2002), p.17.